

Recommendation Form for A. M.

A.M. was recommended to MOVA's Spotlight Program by Lisa Goldblatt-Grace, a colleague and friend. The following was written by Ms. Goldblatt-Grace.

A. M. is one of the most inspirational people I have met in my life. She is warm, thoughtful, intelligent, funny and strong beyond measure. At the age of 15, AM fell in love. By the age of 16, her "boyfriend" began to ask more and more of her to "prove" their love. When he asked her to prostitute on the streets of Boston to earn money for their "future together", she did just that. Her love for this young man, her pimp, superseded her love for herself and her innate ability to put her own safety first. As the violence by her pimp escalated, so did her surety that she would never be able to leave this life of degradation. The streets took their toll on AM: physically, emotionally and spiritually. She was raped and beaten by "tricks" multiple times, and consistently treated as if she was less than human. In order to survive this horror, AM turned to drugs and became addicted. Even after her pimp was incarcerated, the substances and the sense of "once a ho, always a ho" kept her trapped in "the Life".

After years of pain, and after giving birth to three children, AM found recovery. In her process of recovery, AM found herself, a woman worthy of better. She has been clean for over 12 years, and has not been degraded through prostitution in the same amount of time. She works a full time job and is a loving mother to her daughters. In the last three years, AM has gotten involved in the My Life My Choice Project at the Home for Little Wanderers and carries a caseload for the Department of Social Services. AM has taken her personal story of pain and shares it to help others avoid this destructive world or get out if they are already in.

In her work with My Life My Choice Project, AM conducts trainings with youth providers (i.e. DSS workers, law enforcement, etc) so that they may recognize the signs of recruitment or involvement in prostitution and know how to understand, empathize with and support young girls who are involved. In these trainings, AM shares her own story. Evaluations consistently demonstrate how moved and changed her participants are by hearing her testimony. Further AM conducts groups in area group homes using a 10 session prevention and intervention curriculum entitled My Life My Choice. The girls in the groups are riveted by her story. She is able to offer an authentic voice which girls hear loud and clearly. In addition to all of this, AM sees a small caseload of girls involved with DSS who have been sexually exploited. Her presence offers these vulnerable young women the only real sense of hope that anyone can truly bring. Girls in the Life often feel like there is no way out, that one is "damaged goods". AM's story of how she healed herself body, mind, and soul is extremely powerful for these girls and her gentle advice and nonjudgmental ear are so needed. Because of her work, AM is well known and respected throughout the Boston area. She is the only survivor to sit on the steering committee of the Teen Prostitution Prevention Project out of the Suffolk County District Attorney's Children's Advocacy Center. She has presented at national conferences on our

work with My Life My Choice. There are so many layers to AM's positive impact, it is almost impossible to quantify.

AM is both gentle and fierce, thoughtful and strong willed, compassionate and able to call you on your self-defeating behaviors. I have learned a tremendous amount from her. I am honored to be her colleague and her friend. She credits her transition to the community of women she met through her recovery. Though I honor that in her story, it is her inner strength that continues to inspire me.

All Spotlight victim-thrivers have an opportunity to respond to the information provided in the recommendation form and add any sources of inspiration for her/himself.

I had one woman who reached out to me. This woman hugged me, loved me, and nurtured me into the woman I am today. She taught me how to live as a human being. This person taught me how to parent my children. She didn't judge me at all. Today, she still guides me. Also I surround myself with positive people. I hang out with women who I want to be like as I continue to grow up.

Spotlight works to highlight the courage, strength and determination it takes to move from victim to thriver. We hope the following has provided hope to those in need. Any questions, concerns and thoughts can be directed to Alexandra Detjens, Victim Services Coordinator at 617-727-9752 or Alexandra.Detjens@state.ma.us